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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004326

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION DISCUSSES  
KIDNAPPINGS, EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel Speckhard for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: In a November 20 meeting with Charge Speckhard, Sunni Minister of Higher Education (MOHE) Abid Dhiyab al-Ujeeli said that 88 people have been released but 57 are still missing from the kidnapping at the Ministry of Higher Education building on November 16. He blamed politics instead of sectarian tensions for the kidnapping, criticized the Shiite dominated GOI's inaction and said U.S. forces needed to act more quickly. He also discussed education initiatives such as improved security, distance learning and increased funding from the USG and the Gulf States. END SUMMARY.

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Minister Says 57 Still Missing, Blames Politics  
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[12](#). (C) In a November 20 meeting with the Charge, the Minister of Higher Education (MOHE) Abid Dhiyab al-Ujeeli said that 88 people have been released but 57 are still missing from the November 16 kidnapping at the Ministry of Higher Education. He said the kidnappers managed to gather all the people together from throughout the four-story, two-wing building within 15 minutes. He expressed suspicion that members of the Ministry's security service were working with the attackers. He said there were 25 security officers on duty that morning who should not have allowed the kidnappers to enter the building. He speculated that a high level Ministry of Interior (MOI) general was involved. When asked what the MOI would have to gain from this, he said the Sadrist Jaysh al-Mahdi militia would have something to gain, and had infiltrated the police.

[13](#). (C) Al-Ujeeli thought the kidnapping was a political act rather than sectarian, and noted that both Sunnis and Shia were kidnapped. He said it was meant to embarrass the government or keep the MOHE employees from coming to work. He said this was working - even the Ministry's Directors General (DGs) are not coming in.

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Minister Blames GOI, MOI, U.S.  
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[14](#). (C) Al-Ujeeli, a Sunni, blamed the Shiite PM Maliki's government for not taking serious action. He said he told the Prime Minister he does not want words, he wants action. He commented that his people trust American forces more than the MOI or the police. He said one of his Sunni DGs refused an interview with a police investigator out of fear for his life.

[15](#). (C) Al-Ujeeli told the Charge that the MOI believes the

Americans are not helpful because they do not act quickly enough. He claimed that American generals think they are in America and can take their time to track down those responsible for a crime, but the situation in Iraq is different, which demands immediate action. The Charge responded that the U.S. military emphasizes successful planning rather than hasty action that could heighten the risk of collateral damage or hitting the wrong target.

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Help with Education Initiatives  
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16. (C) Al-Ujeeli and the Charge also discussed priorities for supporting education initiatives. Al-Ujeeli said security was the biggest problem. 70 of the Ministry's people are involved in a PSD training program but only ten of them have been provided with weapons. He said finding weapons for all 70 would be a big help and also asked for armored vehicles. Al-Ujeeli discussed his interest in creating a distance learning program over the internet. The Charge noted that given the security situation, this could make it easier for foreigners to engage Iraqis without coming to Iraq and commented that finding new training methods for students that encourage independent thinking are important. Al-Ujeeli agreed and laid out options such as broadening their studies away from religion, teaching them about civil society, encouraging them to download lessons and course material from the internet and establishing workshops to keep them engaged.

The Charge and al-Ujeeli discussed the importance of additional foreign assistance for education. The Charge suggested asking the Gulf States for assistance and offered to facilitate a trip. Al-Ujeeli said the Ministry already has a plan for this and Kuwait has expressed a willingness to help. He specifically mentioned an interest in engaging the

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Saudis. The Charge said he should visit the Gulf States first, and then the Ambassador could engage them with follow-up phone calls, given his strong belief in the importance of strengthening the education system to the future of Iraq.

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